



Utah's Legislators Back to School

-a year round civic education program-

BACKGROUND and BACKBONE **America's Legislators Back to School Program**

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Why was America's Legislators Back to School Program designed?

Because of the growing distrust in government and decline in voting across the nation, especially among 18-25 year olds, a civic education initiative was launched.

Congress passed a bill in December of 2001 that earmarked \$2 million for the projected five-year civic education project, Representative Democracy in America. The project is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, by act of Congress, and the monies go to the following three project partners.

NCSL (National Conference of State Legislators)

CCE (Center for Civic Education)

Center on Congress at Indiana University

Money funded to NCSL goes directly to the Trust for Representative Democracy and funds the materials produced for use by legislators when visiting classrooms across the nation as part of America's Legislators Back to School Program. NCSL established America's Legislators Back to School Week in 1999 as a pilot program and asked several states to participate. In 2000, it went nationwide and Utah was introduced to the program. In 2005, it became a year-round program to provide scheduling flexibility to legislators and schools.

Legislators Back to School is designed to help students understand the pressures and conflicts that legislators face, and to help legislators understand how students feel about issues that affect their lives. To meet these objectives, legislators and students interact in informal discussions, participate in mock sessions or simulated public hearings, and even draft bills together.

How does Utah rank?

2002

Utah ranked #1 in the nation in 2002; 92 percent of the Legislature participated (*State Legislatures* March 2003). Legislators reached approximately 9,000 students in 90 Utah schools in 2002. The Utah State Bar asked

legislators to join judges and attorneys in the Dialogue on Freedom program initiated to benefit students following the tragic events of 9-11, which was scheduled during the same time frame as Legislators Back to School Week. Participation for both programs was counted toward Legislators Back to School Week and reported as such per NCSL's recommendation.

2003

Utah ranked #2 in the nation; 68 percent of the Legislature participated (*State Legislatures* January 2004). A lower percentage is reported in this issue and is not correct. Legislators reached approximately 16,500 students in 165 schools. The Utah Legislature passed its first resolution regarding this program, SCR 3, Resolution Designating Legislators Back to School Week, encouraging all legislators to participate in this civic education event.

2004

Utah remained in the top three nationwide; 74 percent of the Legislature participated (*State Legislatures* July/August 2005). Legislators reached even more students than the previous year climbing to approximately 17,200 in 200 schools. A second resolution, HCR 7, Resolution Recognizing Legislators Back to School Week, also passed.

2005-2006

Utah's legislator participation climbed to 81 percent, and participating students climbed to 18,210 in 220 schools. NCSL launched America's Legislators Back to School as a year-round program in September of 2005, which adds flexibility for teachers and legislators to plan, schedule, and coordinate with each other. HCR 6, Resolution Recognizing Utah's Legislators Back to School Program, passed, continuing to support and encourage legislators to participate in the program.

2006-2007

HCR 2, Resolution Recognizing Utah's Legislators Back to School Program, passed in the 2006 General Session. Legislator participation will be determined by participation during the 2006-2007 school year.

How does Utah encourage participation?

Letters from the President of the Senate and House Speaker are mailed each fall to all principals, district superintendents, and the state superintendent encouraging them to invite legislators into their classrooms to interact with students in meaningful discussions and activities.

A fall packet is given to each legislator containing the following: copies of letters sent to principals and superintendents; a personalized letter from the House Speaker and President of the Senate and Education Chairs emphasizing the value of civic education and encouraging each legislator to take advantage of the opportunity to engage in meaningful interactions with students; and samples and descriptions of NCSL's supplemental materials and evaluation forms.

Intermittent reminders to legislators are relayed via caucus meetings throughout the year, and emails from the program coordinator to key teacher contacts are then forwarded to additional teachers throughout Utah.

News releases hit all newspapers, radio, and TV stations before Kick-off Week each September, and after the year's data is reported to NCSL.

Utah's Legislators Back to School Program is advertised in the *Interim Highlights* prior to the school year starting in fall.

An advocate of civic education sponsors a resolution each year.

Supplemental materials, information, and ideas may be requested from staff in OLRGC's Legislative Research Library & Information Center (W320) at any time during the year.

Web sites of Interest

Civic Education - Utah's Legislators Back to School Program

<http://www.le.utah.gov/lrgc/backtoschool.htm>

Description of Supplemental Materials

<http://www.le.state.ut.us/lrgc/backtoschoolinfo/supplementalmaterials.pdf>

Lesson Plans K-12

<http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/lessonplans.htm>

Overview of America's Legislators Back to School Program

<http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/bksdesc.htm>

Partner Organizations for America's Legislators Back to School Program

<http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/partners.htm>

State Stats: Top Ten Legislature Participation

<http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/topten.htm> (Note: 2003 statistics printed in *State Legislatures* January 2004 should reflect 68 percent participation for Utah)

The Center on Congress at Indiana University Interactive Web site for Kids

<http://www.democracykids.org/>

Trust for Representative Democracy

<http://www.ncsl.org/trust/>

for additional information, contact **Shelley Day**, Utah's LBTS Program Coordinator
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